Mass.Gov

Style Guide

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About this document

Mass.Gov has developed this reference document to assist content providers in writing consistent and appropriate content. Adhering to these guidelines is not mandatory if there are valid reasons for diverging from them in specific cases. To add other standards and guidelines to this document or to raise a question, contact Valerie McKay (Valerie.McKay@state.ma.us, 617-626-4449).

Note: This document is formatted for two-sided printing.

When you encounter editorial issues not covered here, refer to *The Gregg Reference Manual*, Tenth Edition (http://www.gregg.com). Where appropriate, references to sections of the manual are indicated with [Gregg, §§section numbers].

General writing guidelines

The way people read computer screens is considerably different than the way they read printed materials. We tend to read about 25 percent slower from screens than from paper and scan for specific information rather than read line-by-line.

More importantly, most users of government websites visit them to complete a task quickly, not to linger. They have little patience or desire to read through long, dense blocks of text on a computer screen.

Therefore, content authors should follow these guidelines:

- **Avoid simply transferring content** that has been written for other media, such as paper, to the web. Rewrite any content that originates on paper to conform to these guidelines.

  Avoid use of government-insider jargon. When you must use it, always explain what it means with the first use.

- **Write at a sixth-grade reading level** for general comprehension. Mass.Gov serves customers who come from all walks of life with varying levels of education, computer literacy, and English language proficiency. Simpler writing is easier to read and scan.
- **Avoid longer, formal words when shorter, clearer, more familiar ones will do.**
- **Use simple and straightforward sentence structure.**
- **Prefer active voice to passive voice.**

  Example:

  Active voice (preferred): The legislature prepared the budget.

  Passive voice: The budget was prepared by the legislature.

- **Use lists rather than paragraphs** to convey information that doesn’t require explanation. Lists draw attention to important points and cause the scanning eye to slow down. Use bulleted lists for unordered information and numbered lists when order is important. **Note:** Don't go overboard: lists that exceed 8 to 10 items defeat these goals.
- **Be brief.** Restrict content to convey meaning or facilitate navigation. Avoid unnecessary introductory content.

  Long web pages require the user to scroll, possibly forgetting what has scrolled off the screen. Break up content into concise blocks of information using separate content chunks, and, within chunks, brief, news-style headings and subheadings. Breaking the content up helps online readers and screen-reader users to scan and locate the information they want.

- **Use the inverted pyramid approach to organizing your content.** Rather than building to a conclusion gradually, begin lengthy content with the most important ideas in the first one or two paragraphs.

  Jacob Nielsen, usability expert, wrote:

  > Journalists have long used the inverted pyramid approach — they begin a story with the conclusion, follow it with the most important supporting information and end it with supplemental background. This style turns the traditional pyramid writing style (gradually building to a conclusion) on its head. Inverted-pyramid writing is useful for newspapers because readers can stop at any time and will still get the most important parts of the article. On the Web, inverted pyramid style is even more important since the typical user will not scroll to find the nugget of useful information buried at the bottom of lengthy text, whereas motivated users can still scroll to get to additional detail.

Composing links and descriptions

Users read and scan category and resource link labels and descriptions in addition to web page content. Therefore, when composing labels and descriptions, apply general writing guidelines (as relevant) and these additional guidelines:

- **Write links that don't have to be followed.** Give users a clear, accurate, and complete idea of the content at the destination page by using precise wording for the label and employing the description field to summarize content.
- **Match the label to the content itself.** If your link is bringing a user to a general-information page, do not use a label that implies the link is going to information that is another click away.
- **Generally try to match the wording of the link label to the major heading of the target page**, for the sake of a continuous flow. For example, if the first thing the user will see at the destination page in big red letters is "Tips for buying a car," use that wording in your link label (rather than "Buying automobiles made easy").

  However, it is more important for your label to be intuitive and readable than it is to match the destination page. If the heading of the destination page is not intuitive or otherwise problematic (for example; it isn't concise, or it consists of jargon or acronyms), develop your own, more intuitive label. For example, if the headline on the page that contains tips for buying a car is actually "M.G.L. Ch. XYZ, Sec. 57" or "The TFBAC Program," use a more understandable label and trust your users to determine that they have arrived at the right destination.
- **If you are linking to an external website, be sure to indicate that in the label or the description.** This alerts users that they will be leaving your site if they click the link and informs them who is responsible for the targeted information. This is especially important when linking to other portalized sites or sites that have the Mass.Gov banner, where similar look-and-feel could cause confusion. For example, if the Office of Consumer Affairs includes the "Tips for buying a car" page you want to link to, then indicate that in the link label (for example, Consumer Affairs' Tips for buying a car) or in the description.
- **Do not label a link *Click here*, *Learn more*, or similar** (unless there is a good reason to do so and the title attribute is in the HTML code). These phrases are meaningless to software screen readers used by visually-impaired customers.
- **Whenever possible, link directly to a service, application, or information, not to a home page or general area of a website.** Do not frustrate your users by forcing them to navigate farther to reach the content promised in the initial link. However, if the first screen for an application will be a mystery to first-time users, linking to an explanatory web page is preferable.

Referring to Massachusetts

Possessive

The possessive form for Massachusetts is Massachusetts'.

Abbreviation

Avoid abbreviating Massachusetts. If you must abbreviate, use Mass. Use MA only in a mailing address.

Omitting Massachusetts

It is not always necessary to include the word Massachusetts when referring to a Massachusetts person, place, thing, or government organization in links or text.

Include Massachusetts when formality requires it or in contexts that require it for clarity; for example, in groups of links that consist of a mix of state and federal agencies.

Where context makes the connection sufficiently clear, omit Massachusetts. Doing so reduces word count and thus contributes to overall readability. Usually, the connection of the person, place, thing, or organization to Massachusetts is quite clear from context—just about everything on Mass.Gov is directly connected to Massachusetts or Massachusetts government.

Do not precede agency names by Massachusetts (as in "Massachusetts Department of…) unless the official agency name would be nonsensical without it (for example, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority or MBTA).

Commonwealth of Massachusetts versus state of Massachusetts

It is acceptable to refer to Massachusetts as a state or the state of Massachusetts. Commonwealths are states, but the reverse is not necessarily true.

Commonwealth is always in initial cap. However, do not capitalize the word state in a sentence unless it begins the sentence.

Use *Commonwealth of Massachusetts* rather than *state of Massachusetts* when referring to Massachusetts in a formal or legal sense.

Editorial conventions

Capitalization

[Gregg, §§303–306 (Proper Nouns), §§360–362 (Titles of Literary and Artistic Works; Headings)]

Labels, short names, headings, and headlines

Use sentence case (in other words; capitalize the first letter and proper names only) when composing:

- Labels for categories, and resources associated to categories and side modules (such as Conduct Business, Find Information, and News & Updates)
- Short names for categories and resources
- Headings within content chunks
- Feature story headlines

  Examples:

  The Massachusetts economy

  Safety in the workplace

Note: Content that belongs to other agencies may be the exception to this rule.

Literary works

If the formal title of an official publication, statute, and so forth, is part of the label or heading, then capitalize the formal title according to capitalization rules for literary works (title case).

Examples:

Governor signs An Act to Improve Government

Governor signs the government improvement law
(because "government improvement law" is not the formal title of the law)

Abbreviations (initialisms and acronyms)

[Gregg §§501, 507, 508]

Abbreviations pronounced letter by letter (for example, IBM, Ph.D. or p.m.) are sometimes called *initialisms* or simply abbreviations with no special designation. Abbreviations that are pronounced as words (for example, ASCII, ZIP, AIDS, or laser) are called *acronyms*.

- Use all caps for acronyms of two to four letters.
- Abbreviate or state an abbreviation in parentheses after the first full reference in text unless the abbreviation is more commonly used (for example, MBTA or ASCII). Thereafter use the abbreviation.
- The current trend is not to use periods in abbreviations. The following are some exceptions: U.S., Ms., Mr., etc., Co., Inc., a.m., p.m., Ph.D.

Spaces

[Gregg, §102]

- Use one space between sentences.

Pronouns

- Use second person (you) when writing information directed to the reader.

  If you make an update to an archive module, …

- Use a job title when it is important to be specific or when the directions are not, or may not, apply to the reader.

  Example: An administrator can install Firefox on your computer. (The reader may or may not have administrative privileges.)

- Avoid using first person (I or we).

  Example:

  Not: We are responsible for creating friendly URLs.

  Instead: The Mass.Gov IA team is responsible for creating friendly URLs.

Active versus passive voice

Generally, use active voice instead of passive voice. The sentence is usually simpler and easier to comprehend. It is also clear who or what is doing the action (the subject).

Example:

Not: Please see your network administrator if help is needed installing the software.

Instead: Please see your network administrator if you need help [or to get help] installing the software.

Verb tense

Present tense is preferable to future tense. Use future tense only when there is a reason to do so.

Example:

Not: TeamSite Professional View will be available by clicking the link on the TeamSite home page.

Instead: TeamSite Professional is available by clicking the link on the TeamSite home page.

Or (even better): Click CCPro and CCStd on the TeamSite home page to switch between TeamSite Standard and Professional View.

Example (of appropriate future tense):

If you are not designated as an administrator on your PC, you will need to contact LAN Desktop Support.

Dates

[Gregg §§407–410]

- Do not abbreviate months unless space is limited.

  Example: We began operations in January 1999.

  Example: We met on January 30, 2002.

- When necessary due to space constraints, use the following abbreviations: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec.) Do not abbreviate March, April, May, June, or July in any case.

Time of day

[Gregg §440]

- Use lowercase and periods:

  Examples: 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.

  Example: from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

- Use noon and midnight. Do not use 12 noon, 12 midnight, 12 a.m. or 12 p.m.

Gender

[Gregg §1052]

- Write text that applies to both sexes so that no gender bias is suggested.

  Avoid singular pronouns (he, she, his, hers) when referring to both sexes. Substitute they, their, you, or your.

- If absolutely necessary, use pronouns for both genders separated with *or*. Do not use he/she or his/her:

  Example: An individual must sign her or his own ballot.

Emphasis and special formatting (all caps, bold, italics, and underline)

- Use heading styles (Heading 2, Heading 3, and so forth) in TeamSite to apply bold and font size to headings, and to provide structure and organize to the page for screen reader users.
- To emphasize a word or a phrase in a sentence:
    - Use bold if the information is most likely read on the screen.
    - Use italics sparingly if the information is most likely in hard copy, but bold may still be preferable.
    - Limit the use of italics because it is difficult to read, especially on screen.
    - Do not use all uppercase text, underline, asterisks (example, ***not***) for emphasis. (Underlined text is associated with hyperlinks.)

      Example: You can only undo the changes if file has **not** been submitted.
- For a Note, Important, Caution, or Warning introduced with the word **Note**, **Important**, **Caution**, or **Warning**.
- Do not use underline for emphasis because users associate underlining with links.
- Use italics:
    - For book titles and quotation marks for section titles

      Example: Refer to “Italics and Underlining” on pages 82–86 in *The Gregg Reference Manual*.
    - To set off words or phrases from the other text in the sentence for clarity, but not to emphasize the word or phrase.

      Example: Choose either *and* or *or*, or rewrite the sentence.
    - For foreign words and phrases

      Example: The lawyer did *pro bono* work for the church.

Procedures involving menus and commands

Either:

- From the [menu] menu, choose [command], and click the [tab] tab.

  Example:

  From the Tools menu, choose Options, and click the File Locations tab.
- Click [menu] > [command] > [tab].

  Example:

  Click Tools > Options > File Locations.

Note: It is not necessary to include the ellipses (…) after a command (for example, Open… in the File menu).

Lists

[Gregg §107]

- Use numbered rather than bulleted lists in the following circumstances:
    - When the listed items have a specific sequence
    - When the preceding text names a specific number of items in the list that follows
    - When the list sets a chronology

- End the introductory phrase or sentence for a list with a colon.
- Use initial caps for the first word in each bulleted or number item, even if the item is not a complete sentence.
- Use parallel construction for items in the list (all items begin with a verb, for example).
- Use closing punctuation at the end of each item in the list when each item stands alone as an independent sentence.
- Otherwise, use no closing punctuation, as follows:
  - First item in the series
  - Second item in the series
  - Last item in the series
- Do not use *and* or *or* at the end of the next to last item in a list unless it is important to emphasize that all criteria (list items) must be met, or only one criteria must be met, or only one of the items can be chosen.

Numbers

[Gregg §§401, 459]

Spell out:

- The numbers one to nine

  Example: The Mass.Gov team has portalized five agencies this year.
- A number that is the first word of a sentence.

  Example: Eleven more agencies will be portalized by the end of 2009.

Use numerals:

- For 10 or greater

  Example: Can she possibly write 12 feature stories this year?
- For any number associated with a unit of measure

  Example: The pages are only 7 inches wide.
- Before an abbreviation or symbol

  Example: Use a standard 8 1/2” x 11” page.
- To identify pages, figures, steps, and diagrams

  Example: Refer to Figure 2 for details.
- To write percentages

  Example: The portalized websites have 20% fewer pages than the non-portalized websites.
- For all decimals, even those less than 10

  Example: Leave at least 4.5 feet between the units.

For ranges of numbers:

- Use *to* or *through* in text.

  Example: pages 12 to 18

- Use “–“ in tables and charts.

  Example: pages 12–18

When there is more than one number in a sentence, follow these rules:

- If one number is 10 or greater, use all numerals.

  Example: They have 24 computers and 4 servers.

- If two numbers are used consecutively in a sentence, use a numeral for one and spell out the other.

  Example: Enter seven 5-digit codes.

- Place a zero (0) before decimals less than one (for example, 0.35).

Use number spelled out followed by the digits in parentheses

- It is usually unnecessary to use two forms of a number, such as, two (2). The only reason you might decide to use this format is for emphasis.

  Example: Deliver all files to Web Work no later than two (2) weeks prior to the schedule change.

Punctuation

Commas

[Gregg §§122–150, 162]

Use commas:

- To separate the terms in a series

  Example: red, white, and blue

  Example: June, July, or August

- To enclose parenthetic expressions

  Example: The report, now compiled once a year, will soon be available every month.

- Before a conjunction that introduces an independent clause

  Example: Most of the new system is installed, but the printer isn’t connected yet.

- In a string of adjectives to call attention to each

  Example: They replaced the old, noisy, slow printer.

- To set off modifiers that apply to a sentence

  Example: However, the web page is not finished.

- After a long introductory phrase before the subject of the sentence

  Example: Knowing the readers are not technical experts, the writers avoid using jargon.

- To contrast elements in a sentence

  Example: They need to add people to the testing team, not push back the schedule or eliminate testing.

Do not use commas:

- To break up long groups of words

  Wrong: You can press the ESC, to return to the menu, and not save your changes.

- To set off restrictive modifiers

  Wrong: People, who live in glass houses, shouldn't throw stones.

- Between a conjunction and the work it introduces

  Wrong: We need a writer but, we can't get funding.

Semicolons

[Gregg §§176–177, 181]

- Semicolons join two complete independent clauses.

  Example: The book is finished; production starts next week.

- Semicolons separate phrases that contain commas.

  Example: The cover will be red, white, and blue; green, blue, and yellow; or blue and white.

- When two independent clauses are linked by a transitional expression such as *for example*, *namely*, or *that is*, use a semicolon before the expression and a comma afterward.

  Example: Note why the user was successful or unsuccessful; for example, the layout was confusing, or there were navigation issues.

Apostrophes

[Gregg §§505, 622–625, 627–638]

- Use apostrophes with nouns to show possession

  Examples:

  Singular nouns: user's response, witness's account, state's administrative rules, 2003's legislative measures, SEIU's negotiators

  Plural nouns: writers' computers, children's website

- Be careful not to confuse possessive pronouns, which do not take apostrophes, with contractions, which do:

  its not it's, whose not who's, ours not our's

  Example: OCPF revised its administrative rules.

  Example: It's on the Web.

- For possessive nouns ending in s, add an apostrophe only:

  Example: DSS' teams worked hard on the project. [Gregg §631]

- All the teams' efforts resulted in success.

- Omit the apostrophe from plurals that are not possessive:

  Example: Things changed in the 1990s.

  Example: All SOPs are on the Web.

  Example: You have to use fully qualified URLs.

Ellipses

[Gregg §§275–276]

- Use three dots (an ellipsis) to indicate the omission of a word, phrase, line, or paragraph in a quote. Use spaces before and after the three dots.

  Example: “Th[e inverted pyramid approach] turns the traditional pyramid writing style … on its head.”
- Use three dots followed by a period if one or more words is omitted at the end of a quoted sentence.

Hyphens

[Gregg §§901–906, 833–837]

In general:

- Hyphenate a word only between syllables.
- At the end of a line, divide a hyphenated word at the existing hyphen.
- Do not isolate a single letter.
- Do not hyphenate the last word of a paragraph or page.
- Do not hyphenate acronyms or abbreviations.

With prefixes, only use a hyphen:

- Before a proper noun or number

  Example: pre-1985, post-Olympics
- For clarity

  re-cover is not the same as recover

  re-create is not the same as recreate
- With all-, cross-, ex-, self-, half-, quarter-

  Example: all-inclusive, self-indexing, cross-reference

When forming compound words, do hyphenate:

- Compound modifiers before a noun

  Examples: stock-market prices, foreign-made product
- Compound numbers less than one hundred

  Examples: sixty-eight, two-thirds, two hundred fifty-one
- Adjective-adverb combinations

  Examples: best-selling book, well-known company
- Phrases used as adjectives

  Examples: state-of-the-art system, 100-page-per-minute printer
- Numbers before a unit of measure and a noun

  Examples: 11-inch paper, half-million-byte increments
- Noun-participle combinations

  Example: self-training course

When forming compound words, do not hyphenate:

- Compound modifiers if the first word ends in *ly*

  Examples: easily learned program, hastily called meeting

- Adverb-adjective combinations when the adverb can't be misread as an adjective

  Examples: more common command, high level language

Dashes

[Gregg §§201–206, 217]

The three types of dashes (from shortest to longest) are hyphen, en dash (or minus), and em dash.

- **En dash** means *to* or *through*.

  Note: To enter an en dash in TeamSite HTML code, use `&#8212;`

  Examples: 1900–2000, 30–40

- **Minus** is an en dash, the same width as other arithmetic operators.

  Examples: +2, ±5, –4

- **Em dashes** denote a break in thought. Use a space before and after the em dash. Do not overuse em dashes; they can interfere with the continuity of the look and the readability of your content. Instead, consider using parentheses; a colon, semicolon, or comma; or a new sentence.

  Note: To enter an em dash in TeamSite HTML code, use `&#8213;`

  Example: An indicator — a flashing light or an alarm — signals danger.

  Example: The purpose of a focus group is not consensus building — rather it is obtaining a range of opinions from a representative set of target users. (**Note:** The em dash in this example could be replaced by a semicolon, or the sentence could be broken into two sentences.)

Quotation marks

[Gregg §§247–249]

- Use quotation marks when referring to chapter titles, website page titles, and section titles in a document.

  Example: Refer to the section "Punctuation" that follows for information on using punctuation with quoted text.

- Use quotation marks at the beginning and end of a direct quote **unless** you are using the block quote format (the quotation is in a separate paragraph and indented on the left and right).

Punctuation

- Period and commas go inside the closing quotation mark.

  Example: For information on this topic, refer to "Editing Standards and Guidelines."

- Semicolons and colons go outside the closing quotation mark.

- A question mark or an exclamation point goes inside the closing quotation mark when it applies only to the quoted material.

  Example: His first question was, "How do I use this?"

  Example: Stop saying, "Don't worry"!

Misuse and overuse

- Avoid overuse of quotation marks, especially around jargon. Avoid jargon because your readers may be unfamiliar with the term, especially if English is not their primary language.

  Example:

  Not: You can go “live” by removing the *nosend* variable in the HTML form.

  Instead: You can publish your page (go live) by removing the *nosend* variable in the HTML form.

  Example:

  Not: Focus on increasing “buy in” internally.

  Instead: Focus on increasing internal support.

  Example:

  Not: Think of it as having a “virtual” user …

  Instead: Think of it as having a virtual user …

- Do not use quotation marks for emphasis. Instead use bold or italics.
- Do not use quotation marks to enclose a button or key name. Instead use initial caps.

  Example:

  Not: Click “Enter.”

  Instead: Click Enter.

Word/phrase list

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
/ without space or a conjunction	**Example:** broken link/orphan reports, or broken link and orphan reports
Adobe Reader	Not *Acrobat Reader* or *Adobe Acrobat Reader*
affect (v.), effect (v.), effect (n.)	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
all, all of	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
already, all ready	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
alphanumeric	Not alphanumerical
alt text	The common term for the descriptive text that appears as an alternative to a graphic image on web pages
alternate, alternative	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
alphabetical	Not alphabetic.
among, between	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
amount, number	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.

Term (Abbreviation)	Definition or Notes
ampersand (&), and	Use *and* in most cases. Use *&* when it is part of a title (for example, the name of a law office) or when space is limited (for example, in Online Services or the title of a web page). **Example:** Schedule and invite usability test participants. **Examples:** Labor & Employment, Jones & Smith PC Do not use *&* in text or headings to mean *and* unless you are specifically referring to the symbol on the user interface.
and/or	Avoid. Choose either *and* or *or*, or rewrite the sentence. If avoiding *and/or* makes a sentence long or cumbersome, however, it is all right to use *and/or*.
appear, display, or is displayed	See *display*.
appendix, appendixes, appendices	Both *appendices* and *appendixes* are acceptable for the plural, but use the same spelling throughout your document or document set.
Assistive Technology (AT)	
assure, ensure, insure	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
back up (v.), backup (n. or adj.)	**Examples:** Back up the files before you turn off the computer. Save the backup copies on a floppy disk.
because, since	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
below, later	See *later*.
between, among	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
blog (n., v.), weblog	Always define on first use in introductory content, and consider defining on first use elsewhere if the content may reach a broader audience. In introductory content and glossary entries, make clear that *blog* and *weblog* are synonymous. *Blog* is also acceptable as a verb meaning “to publish or write entries for a blog.” *Blogger* is acceptable to refer to a person who publishes or writes entries for a blog.
bring, take	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
callout (n.), call out (v.)	**Examples:** You should call out timely information using feature stories. Add callouts to screen captures to support the text.
can, may, might	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
canceled	The preferred spelling has one “l.”
capital, capitol	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
cascading style sheets (CSS)	*Cascading style sheets* (note that the phrase is lowercase) is an accepted industry term in the context of HTML and XML.

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
caution	See *note*.
chunk	An XML file that is created using TeamSite Forms. These are also referred to as terminal content. Chunks consist of formatted text that are created within TeamSite, can include graphics, links to documents, and other web pages; and can be reused in multiple places on the portal.
click (not click on)	Refer to "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20 for the differentiation between press, type, click, and hit. When referring to a button in a user interface, use *click* rather than *click on*. **Example:** Click OK to close the dialog box.
comprise, compose, constitute	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, state of Massachusetts	Either is correct because a Commonwealth is also a state. Note that *Commonwealth* is initial cap and *state* is lowercase. See "Referring to Massachusetts" on page 3.
cc:	Abbreviation for copy. [Gregg §1361]
data	Typically considered to be singular or plural (datum is not used for singular), but takes a singular verb. **Example:** The data shows an increase in visits to the website.
database (n., adj.)	
dialog box	Always use *dialog box*, not just *dialog*, and not *pop-up window*.
discrete, discreet	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
display, appear, or is displayed	**Examples:** The File Association dialog box is displayed. If you try to exit the program without saving the file, a message appears. Windows displays a message if you do not log on correctly. A message is displayed if you do not log on correctly.
drop-down	Use only if necessary to describe how an item such as a menu works or what it looks like. *Drop-down* is acceptable in content for software developers if necessary to describe the type of item, as in *drop-down arrow*, *drop-down combo box*, or *drop-down list box*.
ensure, insure, assure	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
effect (v.), effect (n.), affect (v.)	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
e.g., for example	Use "for example" if space is not an issue. The phrase is typically preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma.
easy-to-use (adjective)	

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
e-Government	
either/or	Do not use.
email (n., adj., or v.)	**Examples:** I will give you my email address. You can email the attachment to me at work.
Enterprise	The term Enterprise encompasses the IT environment of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Department.
et. al.	Use *and others* instead.
etc.	Avoid *etc.* except in situations where space is limited.
Executive Department	The agencies that comprise the Executive Branch of state government with the exception of the Constitutional Offices: the State Auditor, State Treasurer and Receiver General, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of the Commonwealth.
farther, further	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
FAQ	Do not use FAQ space is limited (such as in Online Services). Instead use *Frequently Asked Questions*.
fax (n., adj., v.)	
fewer, less	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
file name (adj., n.)	
Firefox	
for example	See e.g.
GB, gigabyte	Use the abbreviation only as a measurement with numerals. Insert a space between *GB* and the numeral, or hyphenate if a measure is used as an adjective.
Google	
Governor	Governor Deval Patrick, or the Governor
gray, grayed	Do not use to refer to commands or options that are in an unusable state; use *unavailable* instead. Use *dimmed* instead of *grayed* to describe the appearance of an unavailable command or option. If you need to describe the appearance of check boxes with portions of a larger selection that are already selected, use *shaded*, not *grayed*.
hard copy (n.)	The paper version of a software document.
homepage	
HTML	HTML files, uppercase

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
hyperlink	Use *hyperlink* to describe text or a graphic that users can click to go to another document or another place within the same document. It is acceptable to use *link* once context has been established.
ID	uppercase
i.e., that is	Use *that is* if space is not an issue. The phrase is typically preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma.
if, when, whether	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
imply, infer	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
in, into	Use *in* to refer to typing text. **Example:** Type https://work.mass.gov in the address line.
information, info	Use *information* when space is not an issue. Use *info* only when space is limited (Online Services items, for example)
Information Architecture (IA)	
Information Technology (IT)	
insure, assure, ensure	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
internet, intranet, extranet	
italic	Not *italics* or *italicized*
its, it’s	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
Java	
JavaScript	
JAWS	A screen reader for blind or low-vision users.
KB, kilobyte	Use the abbreviation only as a measurement with numerals. Insert a space between *KB* and the numeral, or hyphenate if a measure is used as an adjective.
label, labeled, labeling	
later, below	Do not use *below* to mean *later* in a book or online document.
lay, lie	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
less, fewer	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
list box	A generic term for any type of dialog box option containing a list of items the user can select. In text and procedures, refer to a list box by its label and the word list, not list box.
logon (n.), login (n.), logoff (n.) log on (v.), log in (v.), log off (v.)	When referring to your assigned name; for example, Peggy's login was margaret1. When describing an action to be performed; for example, When you log in.

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
lowercase (adj.)	
MAGNet	Massachusetts Access to Government Network, the state government's internal network also known as the Commonwealth's Wide Area Network.
may, might, can	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
Massachusetts, Mass., or MA	See "Referring to Massachusetts" on page 3.
Mass.Gov	
MB, megabyte	Abbreviation for *megabyte*. Use the abbreviation only as a measurement with numerals. Spell out in other contexts. Insert a space between *MB* and the numeral, or hyphenate if a measure is used as an adjective.
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	
Microsoft	
might, can, may	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
more than, over	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
Note, Important, Caution, or Warning	Note is used to emphasize the information in a sentence or paragraph. Important is used for a note that is considered to be more critical. Caution advises users that failure to take or avoid a specified action could result in loss of data. Warning is used for information that, if not followed, could cause harm to a person or persons.
number, amount	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
numeric	Not *numerical.*
offline	Gregg §847
online	Gregg §847
over, more than	See "Commonly confused words and phrases" on page 20.
percent, percentage, %	One word. In general, spell out; do not use the percent sign (%), except in tables and as a technical symbol. When spelling out percent, put a space between the number and the word. Always use a numeral with percent, no matter how small.
portalization	A Mass.Gov created term that refers to migration of state web content into the Mass.Gov portal for the purpose of increasing accessibility, findability, search engine optimization, and to promote a single face of government.
pop-up (adjective); pop up (verb)	*shortcut menu* for the menu displayed with a right-click is preferable to *pop-up menu*

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
PowerPoint	
more than, over	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
precede, proceed	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
press (v.)	Refer to “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20 for the differentiation between *press*, *type*, *click*, and *hit*.
principal, principle	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
print (v.), printout (n.)	Use *print*, not *print out*, as a verb. It is all right to use *printout* as the result of a print job.
Request for Quote (RFQ)	
Request for Response (RFR)	
right-click (v.)	Acceptable to describe clicking the secondary (normally right) mouse button, usually to access the shortcut menu.
screensaver	Gregg §847
Secretariat	
set up (v.); setup (n.)	**Examples:** When the system administrator sets up a virtual directory for the site, … The initial setup for your browser requires Internet Explorer 6.0 and server verification for the work.mass.gov website.
shortcut menu	The menu that appears when the user right-clicks an item.
shut down (v.), shutdown (n. adj.)	The orderly closing of the operating system. **Examples:** Shut down your computer before you turn it off. The accidental shutdown may have corrupted some files.
since, because	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
site map	
stand-alone (adj.)	
start up (v.), startup (n., adj.)	
style sheet	
submenu	
take, bring	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
TeamSite	
that is	See i.e.
time-out (n., adj.), timeout (v.)	

Term (Abbreviation)	**Definition or Notes**
that, which, who	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
type (v.)	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20 for the differentiation between *press*, *type*, *click*, and *hit*.
uppercase (adj.)	
use, utilize	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
versus, vs. v.	In headings, use the abbreviation *vs.*, all lowercase. In text, spell out as *versus*. **Examples:** Interviews versus focus groups Interviews vs. focus groups *Smith v. Jones*
voicemail	
W3C	Abbreviation for World Wide Web Consortium, the organization that sets standards for the Web and HTML. Spell out on first mention.
web	
web address	
web page	
website	Gregg §847 – Web site preferred but website is acknowledged as a trend.
when, whether, if	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
which, who, that	See “Commonly confused words and phrases” on page 20.
Window-Eyes	A screen reader for blind or low-vision users.
Windows	
WYSIWYG	(What You See Is What You Get) The ability to see in the editor approximately what will appear when the user views the web page.
XML	XML files
Zip file	
ZIP code	Source: United States Postal Service (usps.com); abbreviation for Zone Improvement Plan

Commonly confused words and phrases

The word groupings are in alphabetical order according to the first word in the group. Words are listed (approximately) in alphabetical order within their groups.

Word	**Definition/Use**	**Example**
affect (v.)	influence	The number of users affects the response time.
effect (v.)	bring about, cause	To effect a change, cut down the number of users
effect (n.)	result	The effect of too many users is slow response time.
all	acceptable in all cases except with a personal pronoun	All the settings have defaults.
all of	used only with a person pronoun	All of them are listed in Appendix A.
already	beforehand	The writer had already started the outline.
all ready	completely ready	The system will be all ready for testing.
alternate	occurring or succeeding by turns; every other, every second	She works on alternate days.
alternative	offering or expressing a choice	Agencies need to provide alternative options for updating content.
among	three or more items considered collectively	It’s difficult to choose among the many content management systems.
between	two or more items considered individually	We’re deciding between Houston, Paris, and Tokyo for the conference.
amount	used with collective and mass nouns	Equipping a training center costs a large amount of money.
number	used with countable nouns	They bought a large number of computers for the training center.
assure	set a person’s mind at rest	We assured them that the project was on track.
ensure	make certain	The procedures were tested thoroughly to ensure that they were correct.
insure	protect with insurance	In most states, cars must be insured before they are registered.
because	show a cause-effect relationship	The portalization project was finished on time because everyone met the schedule deadlines.
since	from then until now	There have been three people in this position since last spring.

Word	**Definition/Use**	**Example**
bring	to convey toward	The bus will bring you here.
take	to convey away from	The train will take you to the city.
can	know how to, be able to	The server can support up to 45 servers.
may	have permission to, be possible to	You may start working on the project now.
might	be possible to (less certain than “may”)	We might finish the project on schedule.
capital	a city serving as a seat of government a stock of accumulated goods; relating to or being assets that add to the long-term net worth of a corporation an uppercase letter of the alphabet	Boston is the capital of Massachusetts.
capitol	a building in which a state legislative body meets, or a group of buildings in which the functions of state government are carried out	The Capitol is open to the public for guided tours from Monday through Saturday.
click	position the mouse pointer; then press and release the mouse button once. Do not use *click on*.	Click the Copy button. Click Copy.
press	put force on	Press the Reset button to start again.
type	press a character key on a keyboard	Type the letter A.
hit	strike with force	Don’t hit the keys on the calculator.
compose	create by joining	A jury is composed of 12 people.
comprise	contain	A jury comprises 12 people.
constitute	make up, form	Twelve people constitute a jury.
discrete	individually distinct, not continuous	Conversion consists of five discrete steps.
discreet	prudent, showing good judgment	Be discreet when you call me at work.

Word	**Definition/Use**	**Example**
farther	physical distance	Don’t place the unit farther than 10 feet from a vent.
further	in addition, to a greater degree	A further problem is the lack of funds.
fewer	used with countable nouns	We need fewer writers on this project.
less	used with collective or mass nouns	We need less staff on this project.
if	in the event that	Tell me if the deadline is Friday.
when	at what time (don’t use *if and when*	Let us know when you’ll finish the draft.
whether	with alternatives, used instead of *if*	Ask whether it’s due on Friday or Monday.
imply	suggest	He implied that I didn’t understand.
infer	draws a conclusion	From user questions, the staff inferred that the manual was wrong.
its	possessive form of the pronoun “it”	The printer needs to have its toner cartridge replaced.
it’s	contraction meaning “it is”	It’s time to replace the toner cartridge.
lay	put or set down	Never lay the cartridge on its side.
lie	be at rest, assume a horizontal position	Al’s dog lies under his chair at work.
more than	quantity comparison	More than 500 people visited the web page.
over	spatial relationships or reference to something that cannot easily be counted	The portalization projects in over 50% complete.
precede	come before	Word processors preceded personal computers.
proceed	continue, go on	Proceed to the next lesson.
principal	most important	The principal topics are written.
principle	rule	Follow the principles of good writing.

Word	Definition/Use	Example
that	non-essential; introduces a phrase essential to the meaning of the word it modifies	We purchased the software that provided the necessary formats.
which	essential; introduces a phrase that is not essential to the meaning of the word it modifies	The new software, which will be installed next week, provides the necessary features.
who	used when referring to a person	Supply the email of the person who will be using the software. Mary, who is a close friend of mine, applied for the job.
use	employ objects for the purposes they were designed for	Tim used a hammer to drive some nails into a block of plywood.
utilize	find a practical use for	We intend to utilize the scrap metal created by this new process.
want	to have an inclination to	If your organization already has a web presence, then you probably have content you want to convert.
wish	to have a desire for (as something unattainable)	She wished she could travel to Mars on a space shuttle.

Resources

- **Gregg Reference Manual**
  http://www.gregg.com
- **Easy to Read NYC, Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communication**
  http://home2.nyc.gov/html/oath/pdf/Easy-to-Read%20NYC.pdf
- **Commonwealth-Specific Glossary of Terms**
  http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=itdterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Policies%2c+Standards+%26+Guidance&L2=Technical+Guidance&L3=Definitions+%26+Glossaries&sid=Aitd&b=terminalcontent&f=policies_standards_it_glossary_terms_050310&csid=Aitd
- **Loosely Coupled**
  http://looselycoupled.com/glossary/azindex.html
- **TechWeb Encyclopedia**
  http://www.techweb.com/encyclopedia/
- **Merriam-Webster Online**
  http://www.merriam-webster.com/